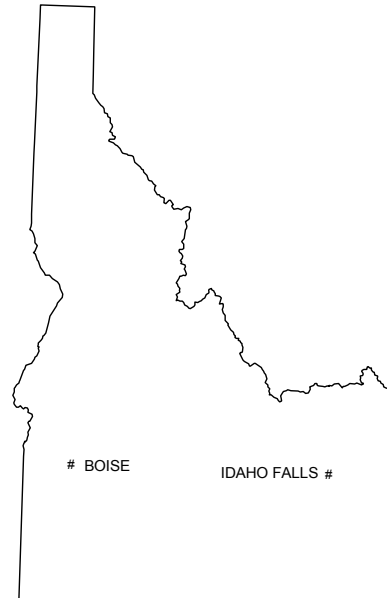


Bonneville Case Study

1990 Census Population	56,356
Central City	Idaho Falls, Idaho
Air Quality Status (1990)	Ozone: attainment CO: attainment PM-10: attainment
Governor Designation Date	March 19, 1992
Voting Policy Board Members	Mayor of Idaho Falls Mayor of Ammon Mayor of Iona Three Idaho Falls City Council members Bonneville County Commissioner Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority
Non Voting Policy Board Members	ITD (until 1994)
PL and 5303 Funding (Year of Designation)	\$79,283 (federal funds only) FY 92 was only a partial year (March-September)
Initial Staff Size	Two (one part time)
Initial Staff Location	City of Idaho Falls offices
Modeling Responsibility	BMPO
GIS Responsibility	BMPO
AQ Conformity Responsibility	N/A
Contacts	Darrell West, MPO Director Alex Siqueiros, MPO Secretary (208) 528-5530 Steve Anderson, Idaho Falls (208) 529-1276 Ron Kerr, ITD RonKerr@itd.state.id.us (208) 334-8272



The Bonneville MPO covers a portion of Bonneville County including the cities of Idaho Falls, Ammon and Iona, as well as a portion of the unincorporated area of the county. It was formed in 1992 after being designated an urbanized area by the 1990 Census. The 1990 population of the Bonneville MPO was 56,356. As of the 2000 Census the population of the MPO had grown to 66,973.

Steps Leading to MPO Designation

There had been several discussions between ITD and a local planning official in 1990 speculating that growth in the Idaho Falls area over the past decade would result in its designation as an urbanized area. After being notified that Idaho Falls would be designated an urbanized area, ITD staff contacted officials with the City of Idaho Falls and other local governments. This initial contact took place in November 1991. In

December, an interim work plan was developed to provide funding to the nascent MPO for start-up costs. This work plan provided \$10,000 (in federal and local funds) to cover the period from January to April 1992. The work plan specified four areas in which the money would be spent—administrative functions, committee support, public transportation planning, and MPO liaison—and in what amounts.

In January 1992, a joint meeting was held between FHWA (a transportation planner from the Idaho Division and another from the former Region 10 office in Portland, Oregon), FTA, ITD, and most of the elected officials and planning staffs from the local governments in the urbanized area. Issues covered at the meeting included an explanation of the Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act (ISTEA), MPO requirements, and how to develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Following this meeting, additional meetings and communications between ITD and local staff resulted in a determination of policy board membership, creation of the TAC, definition of planning boundaries, and drafting of articles of association, fiscal agreements and bylaws. The articles included the name of the new entity, its powers, the organizational structure of the policy board, TAC, and CAC, and the allocation of operational costs.

In early March 1992, ITD forwarded a package of materials to the Governor. This package included the articles of association, the MPO boundary map, a letter explaining the reason for the MPO's creation, and a suggested letter to designate the MPO for the Governor's signature. With minor changes to the letter, the Governor officially designated the Bonneville MPO on March 19, 1992—roughly four months after the initial contact between ITD and local officials.

MPO Committees

The Bonneville MPO has had two standing subcommittees during its history in addition to the policy board.

The nine current members of the MPO's policy board are:

- Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) District 6
- City of Idaho Falls Mayor
- Three City of Idaho Falls Council Members
- City of Ammon Mayor
- City of Iona Mayor
- Bonneville County Commissioner
- Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority (TRPTA)

ITD and the public transportation authority were not voting members of the policy board initially. ITD District 6 had been an ex-officio member of the board until 1994 when it was added as a full voting member. A non-profit transportation provider was added as the ninth member in 1994. In 1998, the Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority was formed and replaced the non-profit as a member of the MPO's policy board. The Bonneville MPO deals only with transportation.

The MPO originally had two standing committees—the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The TAC’s regular membership consists of 15 members (11 from organizations represented on the policy board, two from private transportation providers, one from the Economic Development Organization, and one from MPO staff). The CAC’s membership was drawn from a similar assortment of organizations, with two school districts and five activist groups also included. However, BMPO no longer has a standing citizen’s committee. Advisory committees are now formed for specific projects or tasks.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Policy Board Structure

After the designation of Idaho Falls as an urbanized area, the stakeholders responsible for organizing the MPO relied heavily on the MOUs guiding the makeup and activities of the state’s two other MPOs—Boise and Pocatello. Population was one of the factors used to determine policy board membership. Over 80% of the urbanized area in the Bonneville MPO fell within the City of Idaho Falls. Because of this concentration of MPO population within one municipality, a policy board having one representative of the chief elected official from each of the three cities was perceived as being unrepresentative. In order to achieve consensus, Idaho Falls was given three more seats to be held by city council members. One problem with structuring the policy board in this fashion was that Idaho Falls had a majority of the votes on the policy board and planning decisions could therefore be “veto-proof” if all of the city’s representatives voted the same way. MPO staff described the situation as one where they had to constantly battle the perception that Idaho Falls was benefiting more from the MPO than the other cities. This situation was addressed two years after formation when the by-laws were amended to make ITD a voting member and to add the public transit provider. Targhee Regional Public Transportation Authority was created after the county passed a ballot initiative in 1998. The authority, which previously had been a non-profit entity using the City of Idaho Falls as its designated FTA grant recipient, now has its own governing board.

Funding

In the initial organizational meetings, the parties to the agreement determined that funding for operational costs would be raised through assessments to the member local governments. The policy board would determine the budget annually and the assessments would then be levied on the local governments based on population. The ITD official described the hesitation that the smallest municipality initially exhibited with regard to MPO membership. ITD explained to them that, as part of the urbanized area, they would no longer be receiving funds from ITD’s Urban or Rural Surface Transportation Programs (STP). Without a seat on the MPO policy board, they would also have no voice when it came to decisions about the STP funds that would be spent in the region. This interest in having a seat at the table when spending decisions were made, coupled with the fact that the population-based formula for setting assessments meant that their contribution would be fairly minimal, resulted in more confidence on the part of the smallest town on the MPO’s policy board.

In 1992, the first year of the MPO, PL and section 5303 funds (Section 8 funds at the time) amounted to almost \$80,000. With local and state funds added, the overall budget of the MPO in the first year was roughly \$91,000. Since this was a partial fiscal year (March through September), not all funds were expended. This grew to \$135,000 in year two (\$102,000 of which were federal funds). About two-thirds of these funds were used to pay the salaries of staff. The MPO's initial staff person was a planner who had worked with an MPO in Ocala, Florida. At the time of formation, he was working for the city of Idaho Falls and was shifted into the MPO. According to the state, one of his most important functions was that of being a change agent. His experience in Ocala put him in a position to explain the role of an MPO to policy board members and the public. The second employee was hired part-time to perform clerical duties. A technical assistant was hired after the first year.

Administrative and Technical Support

Another challenge that the MPO has been presented with is the relationship with the City of Idaho Falls. As mentioned above, the City initially had a majority of votes on the policy board, and as the largest municipality in the county, had traditionally been the largest local planner of transportation infrastructure. This dominance at the local level by Idaho Falls has made the current office location for the MPO—it is housed within the city's offices—a challenging one in which to maintain independence. MPO employees are city employees contracted to do work for the MPO. This method for handling fiduciary needs of the MPO was selected because it facilitated the provision of benefits to MPO employees. MPO staff cited the lack of money available to a start-up MPO and the reimbursable nature of program funds as the rationale for becoming a subdivision of city government.

There was agreement among all of the respondents as to the quality of federal support. The MPO staff, city, and state officials agreed that FHWA had been an excellent resource and had provided needed support. After the initial designation of Idaho Falls as an urbanized area, FHWA staff from the Idaho division office visited the Idaho Falls area occasionally to discuss with MPO staff, local officials and the community what their responsibilities were in setting up and maintaining an MPO. In the opinion of ITD staff, the timing of the Bonneville MPO's formation was very fortuitous as it coincided with ISTEA and its more prescribed definition of an MPO's responsibilities. Although the relative isolation of Idaho Falls (five hours drive from Boise, the location of the FHWA Idaho office) has inhibited FHWA's ability to provide a consistent physical presence with the Bonneville MPO, they still provide support in other ways. The MPO's Director is in frequent contact with the traffic engineer at FHWA's Idaho division office and considers FHWA staff as being very helpful with questions. The Director also cited informational documents provided by the federal agencies, particularly those on financial programming, as being very helpful. In addition, FHWA and FTA hold an annual joint meeting with the Bonneville MPO to evaluate how the process is working and to provide an update on new regulations at the federal level. Although one member of the MPO's staff did suggest that any additional help the federal agencies could have provided would have helped as they were initially improvising, a City of Idaho Falls official involved in the MPO's formation believes that there was not much more that FHWA could have done.

Both MPO staff and the City of Idaho Falls voiced support for the state's role in creating the MPO. At the beginning of the process, the city had many questions regarding funding and officials from ITD did a good job of answering them. The ITD official most involved with assisting local officials in MPO formation believes his personal experience in the creation of the Pocatello MPO in the 1980s was important. This official believes that the cooperation between the state and the MPO has been very good, citing the feedback ITD received at the most recent Intermodal Working Group meeting. This group consists of the state's MPOs, all ITD districts, and local governments and it meets every three to four months. At the last meeting of the group, one theme that emerged was the strength of the relationship between MPOs and ITD.

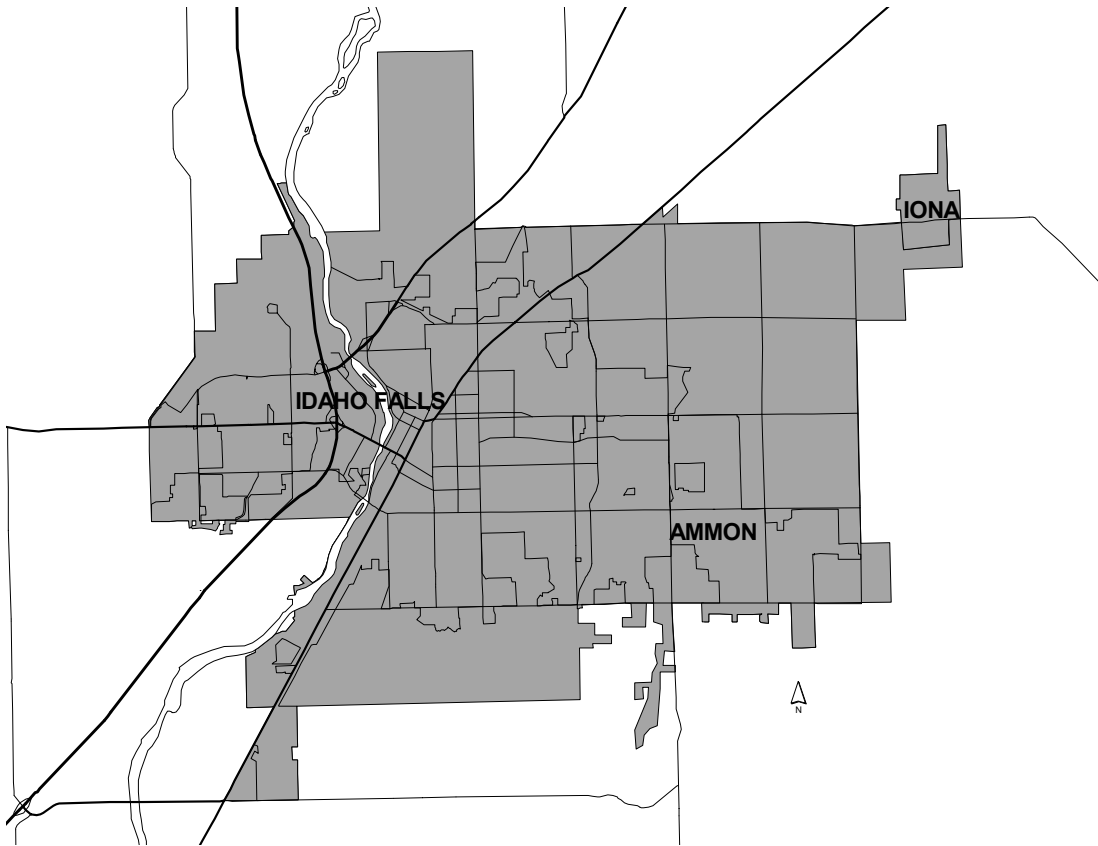
MPO Products

Although the restructuring of the policy board helped to ensure a more balanced MPO process, there were still significant challenges facing the Bonneville MPO in the first years. According to the City of Idaho Falls, it was a very difficult transition from the previous system in which the city was the recipient of transportation funding, to the current MPO framework where all member governments have access to these funds. Part of the difficulty of this transition was due simply to the city's resistance to what was perceived to be an additional layer in the process (although many of the MPO's responsibilities had previously been the state's).

Staff at ITD believes that housing a small MPO in city offices provides the administrative infrastructure (office space, payroll, equipment, etc.) that the MPO needs to get up and running. However, it might lead to problems in the independent planning of programming documents since "they are members of the policy board but they are also your boss." The early years of the MPO were a learning process for all stakeholders, as MPO members and ITD adjusted to coordinating the planning and programming of projects through the MPO's TIP. According to MPO staff these problems have subsided over the last couple of years.

Although some challenges that the City of Idaho Falls and the MPO have had to overcome have been mentioned above, both entities emphasized that their evolving working relationship has more areas of agreement than not. Although the Bonneville MPO has no impact on land use decisions in the region, the city brings all large development projects to the MPO so that an analysis of transportation impacts can occur. City officials consider the technical support that they provide the MPO to be a priority. This is to a certain degree out of necessity, as the city is frequently coming to the MPO with requests. In general, the relationship between Idaho Falls and the other cities has also moved from one of apprehension to collaboration. This healthy working relationship is viewed as resulting from the scientific process used to select most MPO projects. TRPTA's relationship with the MPO has also been smooth, although MPO staff note that the transit agency is very new and is still developing its technical expertise with regard to funding issues.

Note: Four individuals involved in the early years of the Bonneville MPO were contacted for this study. These individuals were an official from ITD, both members of MPO staff, and an official with the City of Idaho Falls.



Map created by Planners Collaborative, Inc.